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SUBJECT: EPR-GOM "DIALOGUE" HELPING TO KEEP THE PEACE

MEXICO 00002426 001.2 OF 003

Classified By: Deputy Political Minister Counselor James P. Merz. Reas

11. (SBU) Summary. In late April, adherents of the Popular Revolutionary Army (EPR) requested a dialogue with the GOM to discuss the status of two disappeared members and offered up the names of several public figures they wanted to serve as intermediaries. However ambivalent about working through intermediaries and about being viewed as negotiating with the perpetrators of terrorist attacks on PEMEX installations, the GOM ultimately sat down with a seven member Commission in mid-May to discuss the modalities and objectives of dialogue with the EPR. With the Commission two months into its tenure, the spokesman for the group expressed frustration with the GOM for its failure to be more forthcoming about its investigation into the EPR disappearances. The government's ability to investigate this case and produce closure is compromised by local intrigue and an array of competing political interests. Some commentators have suggested the appearance of dialogue, however abstract, has probably prompted the GOM to ease up its efforts to capture EPR members while at the time proving a disincentive for the EPR to launch another attack. Should the talks fall apart without a resolution of the disappearances case, the risk of an attack could increase again. End Summary.

Why Talk Now?

12. (U) Since it emerged in the mid 90s -- as the armed wing of the People's Revolutionary Democratic Party (PDPR) established in the late 1960s -- the EPR, with its aim to take power through an armed struggle to create a Marxist-Leninist society, has never pursued dialogue with the government. In July and September 2007, as it launched significant attacks on PEMEX installations, it issued communiqués demanding the government account for the disappearance of two high-ranking EPR members who reportedly managed the group's financial matters and were allegedly taken into custody by local security forces in Oaxaca in May 12007. However, in response, the government not only denied responsibility for the EPR members but also stepped up its efforts to capture those responsible for the attacks.

13. (U) Not unlike many such groups, the EPR is broken up into various factions -- some more radical and prone to violence and others more moderate. Many of its original adherents have been involved in some form of armed struggle for over 30 years leading some to suggest they are tired of living life on the run and may want to reclaim some semblance

of "ordinary life." However, according to Carlos Montemayor, a Mexican writer who produced one of the major texts on the group, the group has effectively renovated its leadership over time with younger members less inclined to give up the armed fight.

14. (C) As the first anniversary for the disappearances of the two EPR members approached, some worried the EPR would launch another attack driven by its radical faction insistent on using violence to reinforce its demands with the government. Instead, the group issued a communiqué dated April 24 requesting a dialogue with the government to resolve the status of its two disappeared members. Alejandro Poire Romero, the Director of Political Development with the Ministry of Government, signaled government intelligence suggested the group was not prepared to launch an attack and was fearful the government's security forces were close to capturing some of its key members. Raul Benitez, an academic who specializes on security issues, similarly thought the EPR may be stalling for time and speculated its more moderate faction may have been concerned another attack would have brought the government's full force to bear upon them.

Who's Talking?

15. (SBU) In calling for discussions the EPR identified four individuals to serve as intermediaries along with the National Front Against Repression. The four individuals named are:

-- Bishop Samuel Ruiz, who served as an intermediary between the GOM and EZLN during the early years of the conflict, is a firm adherent of liberation theology. Ruiz is held in high

MEXICO 00002426 002.2 OF 003

regard among the poor and indigenous populations in southeastern Mexico but regarded as an agitator by local ranchers and businessmen who refer to him as the "red bishop."

-- Carlos Montemayor, a sociologist and writer, who has spent the last decade researching and writing about Mexico's guerrilla movements, including the EPR, from a sociological standpoint, produced what many regard as the seminal piece on this subject titled "La Guerrilla Recurrente." Montemayor was selected by the group to serve as its spokesman not only for his depth of knowledge about the EPR, but because he is not affiliated with any particular political party or movement.

Miguel Angel Granados Chapa, a Mexican journalist, who has served as editor in chief of Proceso (1976-77), Excelsior (1976), and La Jornada (1988-90) and a member of the Federal Electoral Institute (1994-96), made an unsuccessful run as a candidate of PRD for the governorship of Hidalgo in 1999. He has dedicated much of his life to defending human rights and promoting transparency.

-- Gilberto Lopez y Rivas, a Mexican anthropologist and a member of PRD until 2003, who participated in the 1968 student revolt, describes himself as a socialist. According to a recent interview in Excelsior, he did intelligence work for the Soviet military while in the U.S. 1976-78. Lopez y Rivas worked as advisor on indigenous issues with the Nicaraguan Government (1980-1990) before serving as an EZLN advisor during roundtable discussions 1994-98.

The National Front Against Repression named the following three individuals to serve as intermediaries on the commission:

-- Rosario Ibarra de la Garza, who is the President of the National Front Against Repression which she founded in 1979, is presently a Senator representing the Workers Party (PT). Ibarra became politically active after her son, accused of

being a member of the leftist group La Liga 23 de Septiembre, disappeared in 1975. She has been nominated four times for the Nobel Peace Prize and was twice PT candidate for the Mexican Presidency (1982, 1988).

-- Jose Enrique Gonzalez Ruiz, who is lawyer by profession and former Dean of the University of Guerrero, has served as an advisor to the National Front Against Repression. He filed over 150 claims against General Acosta Chaparro for human rights violations and disappearances during the "dirty war."

-- Juan de Dios Hernandez Monge, who is a lawyer by profession and a human rights advocate, is a member of the National Front Against Repression and has been involved in high profile cases including UNAM student strikes and Atenco prisoners.

The Commission's seven members are relying on SERA PAZ for administrative support. SERA PAZ, an NGO that promotes a culture of conflict resolution, provided administrative support for GOM mediation with EZLN.

16. (C) The GOM has identified Alejandro Poire Romero, a member of the Secretary of Government's Political Development Unit, to serve as the government's point person with the Commission. Poire used a painfully legalistic and obtuse argument with Deputy PolCouns to insist the group is not serving as intermediaries but rather as witnesses. Even he, however, seemed unconvinced by his own arguments conceding the government was compelled to make the case for political reasons. Poire maintained the GOM sought to use the group to share all information at its disposal with family members of the two disappeared EPR members in an effort to demonstrate good faith. He stressed the complexity of the case noting the disparate array of elements involved -- the controversial PRI Governor of Oaxaca Ulisis Ruiz Ortiz, the Oaxaca People's Assembly (APPO) which headed up the 2006 violent demonstrations, the EPR which has a presence in the region and has apparent links to APPO, the local police, federal security forces, and the military.

17. (C) Montemayor conveyed frustration with the GOM for is
MEXICO 00002426 003.2 OF 003

failure to share meaningful information on the case of the two disappeared EPR members. He said that the group had met four times with the GOM but that the first two meetings had been consumed by a painful discussion of the group's status and mandate. Lacking information from the GOM, Montemayor said the group had taken up its own investigation of the disappearances by talking with key players in Oaxaca. He was insistent the group had not had contact with the EPR. He reported that the family members of the disappeared members were not satisfied with the government's efforts thus far to share information regarding its investigation. Montemayor maintained that the group would be compelled to resign in short order if the GOM could not demonstrate its determination to produce closure on the case.

Likely Scenarios -----

18. (C) The crux of discussions is ostensibly resolving the disappearance of EPR members Edmundo Reyes and Gabriel Alberto Cruz Sanchez. The EPR claims they were picked up by the police in late May in the midst of its efforts to crack down on APPO. The government originally denied any knowledge of their whereabouts and suggested they could have been the victims of an internecine feud. SEGOB representative Poire claimed ignorance about PGR's investigation of the disappearances. Commission spokesman Montemayor maintained that his group's investigation suggested either the police and/or the military was involved. Security expert Raul Benitez believed the police likely arrested the individuals initially. However, he found it inconceivable that, upon

realizing it had apprehended two significant EPR members, the police would not have contacted the Governor of Oaxaca and local military officials. He also found it hard to believe President Calderon was not aware of what had happened to the two individuals.

¶9. (C) Both Poire and Montemayor were cautious about longer terms prospects for a negotiated settlement between the GOM and the EPR. Poire insisted the government continued to investigate the EPR's involvement in the PEMEX bombings and would not be prepared to include those implicated in any possible amnesty. Montemayor was convinced discussion of the EPR's putting down its arms was a non-starter until the GOM resolved to the EPR's satisfaction the case of its two members. Several months ago, the government arrested two local police officials on grounds they were implicated in the disappearances. However, many suggested that they were mere scapegoats for higher level officials and in July a judge authorized their release for lack of evidence. Most agree the EPR will not be satisfied unless senior level officials are prosecuted and convicted. Benitez suggested senior PRI officials would never countenance the removal of PRI Governor of Oaxaca Ruiz -- regardless of whether he was implicated -- and did not believe the truth would come out until Ruiz had left office. He conjectured an "amnesty light" might be a possibility for long term EPR members not implicated in serious crimes.

¶10. (C) Comment: The opening up of "discussions" between the GOM and the EPR, however muted, has likely contributed to a pause in major EPR attacks and GOM actions against the group. This status, however, is tenuous. It is not unlikely the EPR's harder line faction is growing frustrated with the government over its failure to produce closure on the disappearance of the EPR members as evidenced by recent communiqués threatening a renewal of violence. Meanwhile, the Commission's spokesman Montemayor signaled clear impatience with the government over the lack of progress in the investigation and suggested the group's job had essentially been completed. At this juncture, any prospect for a longer term settlement with the EPR will not be possible as long as the government has not resolved the case of the missing EPR members. The government, for its part, might have the most to gain from the continued appearance of dialogue as it provides a measure of relief from the threat of attack while it decides how to move forward with the investigation of the disappeared EPR members. Visit Mexico City's Classified Web Site at <http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/wha/mexicocity> and the North American Partnership Blog at <http://www.intelink.gov/communities/state/nap/> / BASSETT